



Senator Bob Oke's LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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Senator Oke's Web site: <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/SRC/Senators/Oke.htm> or go to www.src.wa.gov and click on "Senators" in the left-hand menu box.

Senator Oke's Standing Committee Assignments: Natural Resources, Ocean and Recreation, Ranking Republican Member; Transportation. For committee agendas go to:
<http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsladm/calendar.cfm>.

The 2005 session of the Washington State Legislature began at noon on January 10. The regular 105-day session is scheduled to end on April 24. The House and Senate convened after the grand re-opening of the Legislative Building which had been closed since the Nisqually earthquake on February 28, 2001.

Legislative Cutoffs

Each session, the House and Senate adopt deadlines in order to facilitate a timely process. Following are the cutoff dates for certain actions by the Legislature.

March 2 – last day for House and Senate standing committees to move their own bills out of committee.

The deadline for House and Senate fiscal committees and transportation committees is March 7.

March 16 – last day for the House and Senate to consider their own bills

April 1 – last day for standing committees to move bills out of committee from the opposite chamber. The deadline for House and Senate fiscal committees and transportation committees is April 4.

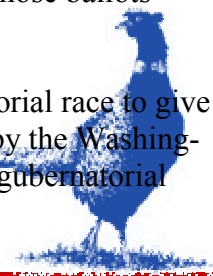
April 15 – last day for the House and Senate to consider bills from the opposite chamber except bills necessary to implement the two-year operating budget, capital budget and transportation budget.

Re-Vote tops Senate Republicans' agenda

Looming large over the first day of the session was the mounting evidence that Gregoire's apparent margin of victory (129 votes) is fraught with votes cast by convicted felons whose right to vote has not been restored by the courts; people not registered to vote; and votes cast by people who are deceased.

Since Election Day, there have been warning signs that King County's elections office has major problems. King County alone had over 1,800 more votes cast than there are registered voters in King County. In addition, King County has admitted that at least 350 provisional ballots, cast by people whose voter registration was not verified, were improperly put into vote-counting machines at polling places. Once those ballots went into the machines, there was no way to separate them from the legitimate votes cast.

After opening ceremonies, Senate Republicans moved to delay certification of the gubernatorial race to give the Chelan County Superior Court time to review the merits of the election challenge filed by the Washington State Republican Party. Three private citizens have also filed affidavits challenging the gubernatorial election, one in Kitsap County Superior Court.



Senate Republicans argued that delaying certification is not a political question or a partisan question, but one that goes to the very core of what makes a democracy work – the trust of voters.

The motion to delay certification was defeated by Democrat legislators who hold the majority in the Senate. During a joint session of the House and Senate on the second day of session, a motion was again made to delay certification of the governor's election. After more than an hour of debate, with Republicans speaking out on behalf of Washington's citizens and their right to have confidence in their election process, the Democrat majorities defeated the motion on a vote of 65-80.

So far, one bill has been filed to force a runoff election between Rossi and Gregoire. (**Senate Bill 5079, co-sponsored by Sen. Oke**). With Democrat majorities in both the House and Senate, it is not likely such a bill will be enacted into law – unless order by the court to do so.

Election reform

Because of the widespread problems discovered in the governor's race, there will be a focus on election reforms this session. Many ideas have already been discussed. Below are the bills that have been filed so far:

- Require everyone to re-register to vote to clean up voter rolls. (**Senate Bill 5078**)
- Require voters to mark ballot envelopes confirming United States citizenship. (**Senate Bill 5080, co-sponsored by Sen. Oke**)
- Require absentee ballots to reach a county auditor's office by Election Day. (**Senate Bill 5082, co-sponsored by Sen. Oke**)
- Allowing voters to indicate abstention from voting on any particular office. (**Senate Bill 5088**) This measure addresses one of issues related to "enhanced ballots" – a process where election workers try determine a voter's intent when ballots are not correctly marked.

Other bills are being drafted to address provisional ballots required by the federal Help America Vote Act (**Sen. Oke**); the makeup of county canvassing boards; and the problem with the timely handling of military and overseas ballots.

Legislature faces revenue shortfall, Republicans reject Locke's call for new taxes

At least a \$1.5 billion shortfall is expected for the 2005-07 biennium. The problem arises from the assumption that the state will:

- continue all current services to include funding the 400 percent increase in pension costs for the next two years and the 11 percent annual inflation cost of health care;
- maintain a \$300 million emergency reserve fund;
- pay the new costs of state employee collective bargaining
- fund I-732 teachers' cost of living increases;
- fund I-728 class size reduction; and
- fund increased higher education enrollments.

The revenue shortfall climbs to \$1.8 billion if we maintain the emergency reserve fund at its current level of \$641 million.

Majority Republicans in the Senate dealt with a huge revenue shortfall in 2003 without raising taxes.

The state's economy has gotten better since then, but our economic recovery still lags behind the rest of the nation. Our jobless rate is still higher than the national average. It is a bad time to increase the tax burden on struggling families and businesses. However, majority Democrats have enough votes in both the House and Senate to fill the budget gap with new taxes as proposed by Gov. Gary Locke before he left office.

Senate Republicans are committed to balancing the budget without resorting to damaging tax increases or draining the state's emergency reserve fund.

Outlawing the giving away of tobacco samples (Senate Bill 5048)

Sen. Oke has introduced his bill to outlaw the giving away of cigarettes and chewing tobacco samples at concerts, rodeos and fairs – events frequented by youth. This bill has been approved three times by the Senate. In 2002, 2003 and 2004 the measure garnered a strong vote from in the Senate, but died in the House of Representatives.

It is illegal for tobacco companies to give samples to persons under age 18. However, Liquor Control Board agents are only able to inspect a handful of the many hundreds of events each year.

We know these samples are getting into the hands of young people and leading many to a lifetime of addiction. We also know that most of today's smokers started before age 18. Every day, 3,000 kids become addicted to tobacco. Every year, 400,000 Americans die from tobacco-related illnesses. Free samples often launch this tragic journey.

Sen. Oke has worked hard to keep tobacco out of the hands of youth since he was first elected in 1990. In its 2003-04 annual report, the American Lung Association of Washington called Oke the Washington State Legislature's foremost champion in the battle against tobacco.

This year's measure is co-sponsored by both the Senate Majority Leader and the Senate Republican Leader and the chair and ranking Republican member of the Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee.

Senate Republican Key Initiatives: Enduring solutions to persistent problems

Senate Republicans have pledged to continue to fight this year for civil liability reform and a fair and rational overhaul of the state's workers' compensation system.

Senate Republicans will also work this year to further their efforts on regulatory reform by proposing bills to significantly reduce the state's quagmire of red tape on businesses. Unnecessary and burdensome regulations force businesses to close and put people out of work.

In addition, Senate Republicans will continue to offer changes to state water law so that there is more certainty and to encourage more efficient use of this precious resource. The need for water in agriculture and for human consumption must be placed on equal footing with fish and wildlife. Good laws will conserve this resource so all needs can be met.

Armed Forces License Plate Collection

Sen. Oke will be working with his colleagues on developing a special license plate collection already approved by the special license plate review board. These special plates recognize the contribution of veterans, active duty military personnel, and reservists. The collection includes five separate designs, each containing a symbol representing a different branch of the armed forces to include the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. Armed forces special license plates may be used in lieu of regular or personalized license plates for motor vehicles.

Long Lake

Sen. Oke has been working with the state Department of Fish & Wildlife and the chair of the Natural Resources, Ocean and Recreation Committee, Sen. Ken Jacobson, D-Seattle, to address the noxious weeds and toxic algae blooms in Long Lake and many of the state's other fresh water recreational lakes. Pursuant to the recommendation of a legislative subcommittee that has been studying the problem of aquatic nuisance species, the department has suggested a small fee on boat trailers to fund cleanups and to fund education programs for boaters about how not cleaning boats and trailers between uses, especially in different lakes, can introduce new weed problems or stall the fight against existing ones.

Toll free legislative hotline: 1-800-562-6000

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